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In This Issue

"Great Cloud of Witnesses"

It's often said that the Bible is the foundation for much of Western literature, especially in English; *much* turns into *most* if we include Biblical archetypes. A cliché that may be, which doesn't, however, make it false. We have literature that is explicitly devotional (Donne, Herbert); allegorical (Dante, Langland, Bunyan, and, in the twentieth century, C.S. Lewis); prophetic (Blake); and mystical (San Juan de la Cruz, Rossetti). Milton, in *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*, audaciously retells portions of the Biblical narrative, as, in the twentieth century, did W. H. Auden, Thomas Mann, and many others.

Sometimes religion is the atmosphere in which the story takes place, or even a sort of character in the narrative – Catholicism in the fiction of James Joyce or Graham Greene, Congregationalism in Marilynne Robinson's Gilead trilogy, and Judaism (both Hasidic and Orthodox) in Chaim Potok's novels. We find this to be true even with religious skeptics (Whitman) or decidedly non-theistic writers –Eliot (George) and Iris Murdoch. Eliot (T.S.), an Englishman who happened to be born in St. Louis, and Auden, an American accidentally born in York, shared, if little else, fundamentally Christian (although of very different sorts) views of reality.

There is, admittedly, literature that is expressly theological: large portions of *The Brothers Karamazov* could be transported straight into a philosophy of religion textbook. Likewise, some theology has achieved the status of literature: Richard Hooker's *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, the sermons of Jonathan Edwards, Newman's *Apologia Por Vita Sua*. But none of them are purely literature, just as *Paradise Lost* and Dostoevsky's novel are not pure theology.[1] Our first article in this issue takes on another imaginative work with theological overtones, James Hogg's Scottish Gothic novel *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*. As Ray Land shows us, Scottish Calvinism is the foundation on which the novel is built, occupying the same place in

[1] In the 1940s C.S. Lewis wrote an essay "Is Theology Poetry?", in which he reached the same conclusion: Christian theology has literary elements, but it is not *only* literature. I fully realize that this begs the question "what is literature?" Library shelves groan under the weight of books on that very topic, including one (by Sartre) titled "What is Literature?" Terry Eagleton, in the introduction to his *Literary Theory*, concludes that there can be no universal definition. Lewis offers this working definition: "writing which arouses and in part satisfies the imagination." That will serve for our purposes.

Hogg's novel that Catholicism does in *Dubliners* or *The End of the Affair*. Land's article also shows us, however, that Calvinism turns out to be the source of multiple readings that suggest quite different moral or theological conclusions. These multiple modes of reading no doubt help to explain the novel's continued fascination for the contemporary reader; Andre Gide, a modern by any definition, was fascinated by the book. As Land points out, there are far too many other things going on in the novel for it to be theology dressed up as fiction: the *concordia discors* between Scottish Enlightenment and Scottish Romanticism, to name just one. On top of that, Hoggs's novel is genuinely scary. I'm sure that Land's article will make you want to read (or reread) Hogg's novel.

This issue also, for the first time, expands the journal's scope to include literature in the common everyday sense: poems written by 2014 graduate Oliver Barclay - Higham. All three poems reflect on the reality of resurrection. With distinct echoes of John Donne, they are at the same time absolutely contemporary. "We Spoke in Whispered Tones" captures that first post-Easter moment when fear gave way to joy, the incomprehensible turned out to be the incontestable. The second poem, "Resonance of Seismic Shifts" records how the pivot point in history continues to echo through the ages. (You can listen to Oli recite it here). "Oh Death," the third poem, seems to me what a Freddy Mercury rewrite of a Holy Sonnet might sound like; one almost hears the stadium crowd chanting in the background. I hope you enjoy them, and we hope to have more in future issues.

Then we have Shepherd Davidson's paper on the use of sermon handouts as worship aids, and their potential to manipulate the congregation's worship experience. In considering these congregational bulletins, a sort of official commentary on the sermon, written by the preacher, Davidson's paper is of a piece with Gray Gardner's article on simulcast preaching, found in last fall's issue. Both confront a fundamental question for today's church: Are we facilitating or impairing the individual approach to God in the worship experience? Just as Stanley Fish's *Surprised by Sin* is no substitute for reading *Paradise Lost*, which in turn does not take the place of reading the Book of Genesis, sermon handouts, whatever their merits, are two steps removed from the lectionary text itself. This of course raises interesting questions about scripture vs. sermon; Davidson, a preaching minister in the Church of Christ in Nashville Tennessee, is well-equipped to help us think about those issues.

The issue is rounded out by a returning writer, Victoria John – Wawa, first published in the Spring 2020 issue. Ms. John – Wawa contemplates the nature of the God as portrayed in the Book of Revelation, one that both conquers for us and suffers with us, certainly images deeply moving for Christians in a time of plague. And we are honored to have editor in chief Eric Stoddart's review of 2018 graduate Rachel Joy Welcher's book on purity culture in evangelicalism, which should enhance (but not replace) your reading of Welcher's book itself.

Once again, the diversity of the offerings in this issue mirrors the diversity of the program and its people. I hope you enjoy them.

Daniel Rentfro
Managing Editor